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RS, XH  
SUBJECT: DAS KRAMER'S QUAD CONSULTATIONS ON RUSSIA,  
UKRAINE, MOLDOVA, AND BELARUS

Classified By: Classified By: USEU Political Minister Counselor Laurence Wohlers, for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

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1.(C) On September 18, DAS David Kramer met British, German, and French counterparts (aka "The Quad") to coordinate policy approaches to Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus. During the three hour consultations the Quad compared notes on Putin's control of Russia's leadership transition, agreed to coordinate strong messages on OSCE monitoring of elections, and reaffirmed the need for robust engagement on a range of Euro Atlantic concerns including Kosovo, Iran, and frozen conflicts. U.S. Ambassador to Belarus Karen Stewart briefed the Quad on the political and economic situation in Belarus and expansion of U.S. sanctions there. Quad members agreed to coordinate responses to any future good or bad moves by the authorities in Minsk. Ukraine's domestic political situation remained an obstacle for deeper engagement, but European Quad members were optimistic about the possibility of WTO accession by the end of this year. On Moldova, Kramer noted the lack of Russian interest in engaging on Moldova-related CFE issues did not bode well for resolving the conflict there.

END SUMMARY

Participants

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2.(C) Deputy Assistant Secretary for European Affairs David Kramer was joined by U.S. Ambassador Karen Stewart (Minsk), USEU Polmincouns Larry Wohlers, and Poloff notetaker. Germany was represented by Ambassador Hans-Dieter Lucas, Special Envoy, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Caucasus, Federal Foreign Office of Germany. The French delegation was led by Aurelia Bouchez, Director for Middle and East European Affairs, MFA, and accompanied by Maxime Lefebvre, Counselor, Permanent Mission of France to the EU. The UK delegation included Michael Davenport, FCO Director for Russia, South Caucasus and Central Asia, Nicola Willey, FCO Director for Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus, and Angus Lapsley, Political Minister-Counselor, UK Permanent Mission to the EU.

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Russia  
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## Succession Issues

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3.(C) Russian leadership succession and election issues dominated the first half of the discussion. All assessed that Putin's primary objectives were controlling the leadership succession to ensure policy continuity and maintenance of his own political and economic influence, and to avoid lame-duck status as long as possible. Consequently, Ambassador Lucas said the German MFA did not expect major policy changes in the foreseeable future. Lucas also dismissed the idea Putin would attempt to retain the Presidency given his earlier public insistence on following the Constitution. UK Director Davenport pointed out that any new Kremlin leadership in which a former leader still pulled the strings would be a new development in contemporary Russian politics. The French, with their Foreign Minister in Moscow the same day, highlighted their concerns about the hollowing out of Russian democratic institutions.

4.(C) While the appointment of Viktor Zubkov as Prime Minister was surprising, his close ties to Putin were well known to the Quad. The French considered Zubkov "not fit for the job," but rather knowledgeable about Putin's personal financial holdings. When asked to assess whether Putin was a "king-maker" in his own right or merely "first among equals" vying for political power, Bouchez pointed out that competition was a "permanent tendency" in the Kremlin. The French and UK shared the belief that Putin's power derived from his ability to strike a balance between competing groups and forces. Therefore, it was in Putin's self interest to keep his options open until the last minute and others guessing. While Lucas acknowledged the possibility that Putin could try to provoke a crisis (e.g. with Georgia) as a justification for staying in office, he believed that Putin

was "consistent in his words and actions," and so would ensure a stable transition of power.

## Election Monitoring

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5.(C) Quad members agreed that Moscow was seeking to stymie any OSCE effort to conduct independent monitoring of the Duma elections in December. The U.S. and UK expected that Russia would try to limit an ODIHR mission to a small number of observers, for a short time period, and with limited access. In any case, Quad members agreed with a U.S. suggestion to urge Russia to issue an invitation to ODIHR to observe the elections as soon as possible. The UK also noted the importance of a consistent message to Moscow, including no limitation or conditions on the ODIHR mission, or relaxation of OSCE standards. Bouchez noted that French FM Kouchner was to raise the issue that day in Moscow.

## Security and External Issues

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6.(C) Missile Defense and CFE: DAS Kramer provided Quad members with a thumbnail sketch of bilateral consultations with Russia on security issues. He pointed out that the Moscow's pre-conditions for cooperation on Missile Defense - that we suspend our negotiations with the Poles and Czechs -- were a non-starter, and that our work with Poland and the Czech Republic continued. Meetings between U.S. and Russian experts on CFE Istanbul Commitments were also inconclusive. While the Russians had indicated a willingness to explore a fact-finding visit to the Gudauta (Georgia) base, they expressed no interest in moving forward on Moldova. All sides attached importance to continued dialogue with Russia. Lucas reaffirmed German support for the U.S. step by step approach to the CFE, stating that Berlin was evaluating how best to use its own channels to Russia to do the same. Lucas said that Russian First Deputy FM Denisov recently told him that "CFE construction was a problem but that Russia did not want to destroy European security architecture."

7.(C) Kosovo: The Quad agreed to make the best possible effort to pursue the Troika process, but to prepare in the

event of an unsuccessful outcome. Lucas urged the Quad to take seriously Putin's linkage between Georgia and Kosovo; noting that in a recent meeting, Denisov warned him that the West "should not overestimate Russian leverage over South Ossetia and Abkhazia." Bouchez said France fully expected Russia to "ruthlessly exploit" Euroatlantic action on Kosovo in the absence of a UNSCR to take action in many other areas, although not necessarily in Abkhazia. She further assessed that Russia believed it could control the risks for the Northern Caucasus of its making Kosovo a precedent for Georgia. However, Russia's paramount interest, was to create a check against any future enlargement of NATO. All agreed that the Kosovo precedent argument was a dangerous card for Russia to play.

8.(C) WTO: Germany was concerned about Russia's increasing reluctance to join the WTO, noting that it would complicate Europe's economic relations with Russia. Davenport underscored the Quad's collective interest in integrating Russia into international structures -- especially the WTO -- but without lowering the standards for doing so. Participants acknowledged a lack of insight into Russia's internal policy debate on WTO accession but agreed that the possible departure of Economics Minister German Gref from the Russian Government would be a serious blow to Russia's efforts.

#### Two-track Engagement Not Isolation

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9.(C) The Quad concurred on the need for engagement, and not isolation of Russia. Germany counseled patience in light of anticipated difficulties through the next two years. The UK assessed that while there might be resolution of some (unspecified) issues in the spring of 2008, we might have to agree to disagree on others, as there would be no fundamental shift in Russian positions. Given concerns about the rise of nationalistic trends in Russia, France believed it was necessary to differentiate between Russian actions taken for external or domestic interests. This also dictated the need to talk to the Russians more, not less. Lucas noted that (the West) "shouldn't lose Russia, though they may lose us." The UK agreed that we should "use any and all existing tracks to pursue our agendas."

10.(C) UK, France, and Germany generally supported the development of a double track approach including a "positive" agenda (with common objectives) and a "difficult" agenda. Bouchez suggested the Quad consider identifying some of the common goals for a positive agenda before the Russian political transition, which could increase the possibility of some elements in the agenda surviving. The French and Germans also supported the UK call for a narrative on how much Europe could push Russia without breaking the relationship entirely. In the same vein, Germany indicated frustration with continued (European) failures to look at the overall relationship with Russia instead of that of individual member states.

11.(C) Quad members concurred with the U.S. call to avoid allowing Russia to dictate linkages between issues, as this would drive up the price of solving any one of them. Tradeoffs, they agreed, would not guarantee positive results; each foreign policy issue - Kosovo, missile defense, CFE, Iran, NATO enlargement, etc. - should be pursued on its own track and on its own merits, not linked together. France and the UK, however, noted the importance of prioritizing and suggested that Georgia MAP was one area we did not necessarily have to pursue. Germany agreed, noting a Georgian MAP was not whether but when (but clearly not any time soon).

12.(C) Members debated the idea of convening a G-7 Political Directors meeting on Russia on the margins of the UNGA, an idea originally from the UK, which strongly voiced continued strong support. The French were unsure, and the Germans worried Russia would view such a meeting as a provocation.

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Belarus

13.(C) Ambassador Stewart reviewed the current political and economic situation in Belarus, noting the recent rise in arrests and harassment of opposition figures and the growing difficulties for Belarus' economy in light of higher energy prices. She also highlighted possible opportunities for Lukashenka to improve relations with the West, including through the release of political prisoners through a general amnesty to be considered by parliament on October 2, and noted the upcoming October 14 European March. In the event that Lukashenka released some, but not all political prisoners, the United States urged that the other members of the Quad (and the EU as a whole) stick to its current hard line policy on sanctions and contacts. DAS Kramer also sounded a note of concern about the recent Georgian Interior Minister's visit to Minsk. The other Quad members professed to have been unaware of this development.

14.(C) Germany stated there would be no major changes in EU policy. The UK stressed the importance of remaining united. German and French officials expressed concern about growing Russian influence in Belarus, with Lucas wondering aloud what it meant for the Transatlantic approach to Belarus. Germany and France agreed that Russia was pursuing a calculated strategy vis-a-vis Minsk designed to ensure stability for its energy assets and defense related cooperation with Belarus. Russians were scooping up privatized Belarusian strategic infrastructure and energy assets in lieu of cash for their higher-priced gas. The UK was interested in exploring what points of influence Europe could exploit to make inroads with the GOB on economic issues. All agreed that we should explore possibilities for getting more involved in Belarus' privatization, possibly through the EBRD.

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Ukraine

15.(C) DAS Kramer shared U.S. expectations for the Ukrainian Parliamentary elections, noting that the outcome would likely

be similar to that of March 2006, but with a worse outcome for the Socialists. The Quad agreed on the importance of signaling to Kiev the need to stand up a government and get on with the business of running the country. This included the long-delayed constitutional reform needed to put into place the checks and balances needed for stable democratic governance. France and the UK expressed concerns about some backsliding on reform, as well as increased Russian influence in Ukraine. In the same vein, DAS Kramer summarized U.S. concerns about corruption driven by the energy sector, especially through RosUkreEnergo. France and the UK saw rising Russian-supplied fuel prices as a possible problem that increased the need for a capable government in Kyiv. However, despite the political turmoil of recent months, the WTO accession process had continued to move forward. It needed to be kept on track.

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Moldova

16.(C) The French complained that Chisinau was, on one hand, pressing the EU to do more, but on the other, delivering little in the way of political and economic reform and the frozen conflict with Transnistria (where they sought EU support against Russia). The UK worried that Voronin was perhaps not receiving a full or accurate picture of Moldovan inaction and EU action from his lower level staff. The EU would have to find ways to go directly to him with clear messages on these issues. Bouchez said that it was not in Europe's interest to see Moldova become an economic, corruption, and trafficking "black hole" in its midst, in addition to its Transnistria problem.

17.(C) This message has been cleared by DAS Kramer.

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